

# Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla

September 13 - October 16, 2013

Chantal Crousel Gallery is pleased to present two new films by Allora & Calzadilla, co-produced with the Festival d'Automne à Paris.

*Apotomē* takes as a starting point, a historic attempt, set against the backdrop of the French Revolution, of man trying to communicate and create new relations with animals held in captivity- in this case two elephants, affectionately named Hans and Parkie (or Marguerite), that arrived at the Museum of Natural History in Paris in March 1798 as spoils of war.

That same year, on May 29th, a concert was performed in the Jardin de Plantes to the elephants. This experiment was organized by musicians (and not scientists), to see if human music might elicit a reaction in non-human forms of life. The very concepts of man, life, & nature and the boundaries between them as defined by relations to war, captivity, slavery, and other forms of social and political domination and control emerged in this period. To this mix is the added question of music, as a possible inter-species metalanguage- a proto-linguistic, nonsymbolic and affective trans-human mode of communication whose basis is biological and evolutionary.

*Apotomē* is centered on the bone remains of the two elephants, currently in the Zooteque- a vast subterranean storage facility housing thousands of animal specimens. In a parallel research, the artists came across vocalist Tim Storms, a man with extraordinary vocal gifts. He has the world's deepest voice. It can reach notes as low as G-7 (0.189Hz). That's a remarkable 8 octaves below the lowest G on a piano. So low, in fact, that only animals as large as elephants are able to hear them.

*Apotomē* is an experiment of another kind, involving Tim Storms singing to the elephant remains in his unique vocal range, songs from that original concert such as: "Iphigénie en Tauride" (1779) by Christoph Willibald Gluck; "O ma tendre musette" by Pierre Alexandre Monsigny; to the Revolutionary anthem "Ça ira," among others.

The film is titled *Apotomē*, an archaic greek word referring to an arithmetical division of musical sound by the Pythagoreans. An interval of a semitone in the Pythagorean scale that is slightly greater than half, this arithmetical musical ratio, doesn't lack in exactitude, on the contrary, its quite precise. It's an excess of human sensation. The normal voice cannot produce it, nor can the ear detect it. *Apotomē* is an irrational remainder or residue, literally meaning "what's cut off."

The film *3* takes as its subject the Venus of Lespugue, one of the world's best known Upper Paleolithic Venus figures, sculpted in mammoth ivory. There are many hypotheses surrounding the Venus' paradoxical or "peculiar ideal" of beauty due to her exaggerated proportions that could be read almost as deformities. Some theorists take the Venus to be related to intensified fertility, life creation and regeneration, while others relate her symbolic role to prehistoric religion and propose her as a deity or goddess, still others look for signs of a "realistic" representation of the physical population, while still others assign an erotic function.

In the artist's research into the field of biomusicology, they came across yet another speculative hypothesis about the possible "meaning" of the Venus of Lespugue's famous curves. Ralph H. Abraham, a mathematician and chaos theorist, and William Irwin Thompson, a social philosopher, critic, and poet, argue that "the linear measurements taken from the Venus of Lespugue closely match the diatonic scale of the Vedic Aryans, also known as the Dorian mode of the ancient greeks." Taking this theory by Abraham and Thompson which the authors call the "Canon of Lespugue" as a point of departure, Allora & Calzadilla decided to make a film that attempts to portray, in visual

and musical terms, a process of transcription of the Venus figure into music, using the proportions of the statue as a musical scale. They asked composer David Lang, to write a score, based upon these rules for solo cello<sup>1</sup>. For the film, cellist Maya Beiser performs David's composition to the original Venus of Lespugue. This musical experiment took place in the ancient bifacial stone storage room of Musée de L'Homme<sup>2</sup>.

The artists chose to title this film 3, finding a formal parallel in the curves of the Arabic numeral and the Venus figure. Second, 3, refers to metaphysical or sacred dimension of Number understood by the Pythagoreans to be the principle of all things. The last unit of the archetypal triad paradigm, three, represents harmony- both as a musical and arithmetic correlation. However, as the ancients eventually discovered in their efforts to find an absolute, immutable system of order, (and not unlike those of the classicists of 17th century onwards which gave birth to institutions such as Natural History), there were sounds, and hence arithmetic ratios and thus realities that were in-measurable and irreducible.

Taken together the films in this exhibition, *Apotomē* and 3, explore the relations between proportions & disproportions, harmony & dis-harmony, commensurable & incommensurable relations.

-----

1. Outside the argument proposed by Abraham and Thompson, Pythagoras is usually attributed to discovering the Dorian mode- having first recognized the nature of these harmonic intervals in the sounds of hammers beating out iron in a brazier's shop and then later refining and proving his theory on a monochord. The artists asked David Lang to compose a work for cello, a modern descendant of that ancient instrument.

David explains his approach to the composition as follows:

"The piece is based on the proportions or scale of the statue. The statue is divided into 72 units, so that is what I did with mine. The entire piece is 72 beats per minute. Phrases, or order of notes, are added in proportion to the measure of the intervals of the Venus. The composition is divided into three sections, with a coda. The notes in the first section are a kind of rugged 'animal' pizzicato, gradually introducing the notes of the scale, in proportion to the intervals of the 'Venus' mode. The second section adds arpeggios outlining some chords present in the 'Venus' mode. The third section is a tune outlining the line of the mode. The coda makes a little loop out of the notes of the scale that most clash with each other."

2. These two-sided, or two-faced stones, are the longest-used tools of human history. The artists explain about the unique setting for the film, "It is a room filled with prehistoric Janus Bifrons, of gateways and passages, looking equally to the future and to the past. David's composition and Maya's singular performance in some manner stand as a bivalent measure of the distance between ours and this past humanity."